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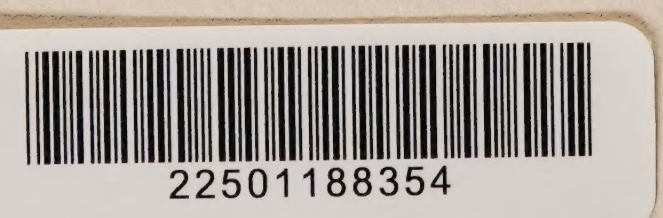
"Blessed are the Merciful"

In Memoriam

Florence Nightingale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"Blessed are the Merciful"

A DISCOURSE

delivered in

Ullet Road Church, Liverpool,

by

Rev. J. COLLINS ODGERS, B.A.,
Minister of the Church,

On Sunday Morning, August 21st, 1910,

the day following the interment

of

FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE.

This Discourse
is dedicated
to all who heard it;
and
especially to those who for many years
have taken deep interest
in the relief of suffering,
and in the support of institutions
which provide Trained Nurses
to attend the Sick Poor
in their own homes.

All the incidents mentioned in this discourse are given in Miss Sarah Tooley's "Life of Florence Nightingale"—a memoir which has supplied the writer with the information he required.

Matthew v. 7.—"BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL."

YESTERDAY in a quiet country churchyard in the South of England was laid to rest all that was mortal of one who, for the last fifty years, has been the object of a nation's profound esteem and admiration. In the rich fruits of her efforts there is presented a wonderful object-lesson of the power of a noble life to sanctify and bless the lives of others, as well as a demonstration of the capacity of the self-sacrificing spirit to initiate movements on the largest scale fraught with incalculable blessings for those who need them most. There have been pessimists who have refused to see signs of any progress in society, and have bewailed the apparent weakness of all moral and spiritual forces to redeem humanity. But here, in the life of Florence Nightingale, may surely be found sufficient to confute them. One person only, one life devoted to the call of duty, one strong desire to meet a dire necessity, whatever the cost might be; and from that devotion and self-sacrifice have come unexpected harvests of most blessed results for the aid of suffering humanity. And the tide of loving helpfulness, emanating from the heart of this brave heroine, still sweeps on round the world with ever-widening influence. Her sense of the sacredness of duty has strengthened that sense in thousands everywhere. Her willingness to consecrate her natural skill to the relief of pain and disease has been the vital and re-organising power in the nursing profession, whilst her quiet modesty enveloped with a tender grace and glory all that she accomplished.

Blessed indeed are the merciful—blessed because of the sacred joy which comes to them in the consciousness of beneficent results so far exceeding their most sanguine expectation; and blessed also because, even if the outcome be but small, there is the conscious exercise of some of the noblest powers with which the Creator has endowed the souls of men.

To-day all Britain mourns her loss, and yet at the same time all Britain rejoices in the magnitude of her achievement. You all know the story of her life, but perhaps to-day as in the spirit we stand around her quiet resting-place, you may like to recall some of the incidents in her life-history. It was long ago that she earned the gratitude of her Queen and country, and the latter portion of her life has been that of a confirmed invalid cut off from most of the pleasures of the world. Yet in her retirement she has never been forgotten, and she has died with the all-sufficing satisfaction of knowing how large and how valuable have been the beneficent results of her painful experiences at the seat of war. To her the whole world of suffering mortality owes an incalculable debt of gratitude.

Florence Nightingale was born on May 12th, 1820, at a villa near Florence, in Italy; hence the suggestion to her parents, who were visiting Italy at the time of her birth, that their daughter should be called after that famous city. Her father—William Shore Nightingale, of Lea Hall, Derbyshire—was a wealthy country gentleman, far in advance of his time in refinement and culture, a keen educationalist, a zealous churchman, one who encouraged every good Christian undertaking. Her mother was the daughter of William Smith, who for fifty years represented Norwich in Parliament, a man of widest sympathies and great moral courage. From her father Florence inherited a love of knowledge, thoroughness and earnestness in every study, conscientiousness in every duty; from her mother simplicity and gentleness, a broad charity, a far-extending philanthropy, a regard for every suffering thing. From the first she was opposed to that

attitude of rigid denominationalism which refuses to see any redeeming features in those who profess a creed other than one's own. All through her life she gave evidence of that nobleness of heart which recognises in every sect and church the pure spirit of self-sacrifice for the good of others, and that was the spirit of Christ.

From her earliest years she enjoyed every advantage of position, rank, and wealth, yet none of these could spoil the sweet gentleness and natural simplicity of her character. She lived in the country far away from the haste and bustle, the attractions and dissipations of a great city, for her father was the owner of two country seats, Lea Hurst in Derbyshire, and Embley Park in Hampshire. At both these places she was greatly beloved by her father's tenants who regarded her as an angel in the homes of the poor. The story is told how she set the leg of a shepherd's dog and healed the injury when its owner had given up all hope of its recovery; this success encouraged her to try her hand in the alleviation of suffering in cases of accident among the tenants. In every such undertaking she showed coolness, order, method, a well-balanced and receptive mind. A gentle yet decisive word from her went far to restore courage and to minimise pain. As she grew up she learnt to speak with fluency the French, German, and Italian languages. She desired to prove her friendship for the young women who lived in the neighbouring cottages, and for their sake organised a Bible class on Sunday afternoons at her own home to which she welcomed Dissenters as well as Church people; for, as I have already stated, difference of creed was never with her a bar to friendship. Now and then she went with her parents and sister to London, and on one occasion was presented at Court, but nowhere was she so happy as in the retirement of her own country home. Two severe illnesses among members of her own family called forth her nursing faculty more decidedly than any other experience. In the hour of danger it was a cause of keen regret that she could do so little to relieve the physical

suffering of those she loved, and she resolved to obtain for herself, in view of such contingencies, some thorough training in the art of nursing. But where could she receive that training? There were no trained nurses to be obtained in cases of sickness in private families; scarcely any that could be called trained in the largest and best known hospitals; and in the workhouse hospitals none but decrepit old women, utterly incapable, unreliable, and often intemperate. Florence Nightingale was the second lady in England to see and to understand the paramount need of trained nurses everywhere. Who was the first to perceive that great necessity? None other than Mrs. Fry, the Quaker philanthropist, who had herself established in London a small training home for nurses. To Mrs. Fry, Florence accordingly repaired, and thus it came about that these two great and noble-hearted ladies were associated in the work of Christian philanthropy, and in the inauguration of a beneficent movement which has spread from land to land. It was in consequence of Mrs. Fry's recommendation that Florence commenced seriously and whole-heartedly to prepare herself for the profession of a nurse—not that she had any need to earn her living, not that she contemplated any systematic exercise of her powers in that direction, but because the need of trained nurses was to her mind one of the gravest public necessities, and if she would publicly proclaim that need, she felt that she must herself be familiar with every duty which would devolve on a member of a nursing staff. With this object she went to Kaiserswerth on the Rhine, near Düsseldorf, and there entered as a student the first regular training school for nurses established in modern times. Its founder was Pastor Fliedner, a minister of the German Reformed Church, who called it a Protestant Deaconesses' Institute. When Florence entered it in 1849 it had been in existence sixteen years. She remained there a whole year, submitting to the strictest rules, consenting to the absence of all her usual comforts, and winning the admiration and the love of all. On her return she studied in the

principal hospitals of London, Edinburgh, and Dublin, and then visited hospitals in France, Germany, and Italy. Her father's high position and influence could ensure for her an entrance anywhere, but still more powerful than such extraneous influences were her own gentleness and kindly feeling, her quiet unassuming disposition, her earnestness in everything which had to do with the alleviation of suffering. As her own training became more and more efficient, she felt more deeply the urgent need of opening the nursing profession to women, and of encouraging young women of good standing and of high moral and intellectual powers to enter it. She wrote a little book advocating the immediate formation of an order of deaconesses in England on the lines of Pastor Fliedner's institution on the Rhine. At once the suspicion of English Evangelical Protestants was aroused; she was pressing forward a disgraceful scheme by which disguised Popish emissaries with holy water, crucifix, and chrism might gain access to the bedsides of the sick and dying. In spite of such senseless objections Miss Nightingale pursued her own quiet way. Had she possessed less earnestness of purpose, or had there been a grain of timidity in her soul she might have desisted from her enterprise, and the world would have lost one of its noblest pioneers in the cause of humanity. But happily she knew no fear, and notwithstanding the attacks of her detractors did not hesitate to learn some valuable lessons from the great Roman Catholic Sisterhoods on the continent; more than once she visited the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul in Paris. In due course she accepted an urgent invitation to the post of head of the Harley Street Home for Sick Governesses; but this proved to be too arduous a position for her slender physique, her strength was overtaxed, and by-and-by she was compelled to return to her lovely home in the country enfeebled in body but still undaunted in mind. She would be patient until there should come another chance of proving to the world the need of the great reform which she advocated with all the ardour of her soul.

And now came the great opportunity of her life. All her previous experience had been, under Providence, the preparation for what was now to come. England, with her allies, Turkey, France, and Italy, declared war with Russia on March 28th, 1854. The Secretary of State for War in Lord Aberdeen's Government was Mr. Sidney Herbert, afterwards Lord Herbert of Lea, one of the best and noblest men of the age, and a personal friend of the Nightingale family. The campaign began with the highest hopes, and with the brightest expectations the British fleet sailed for the Bosphorus. The victory of the battle of Alma soon followed, and then the darker, sadder side of war was at once manifest. Hundreds upon hundreds of wounded soldiers were brought from the Crimea to Scutari, on the Asiatic coast opposite to Constantinople, but there was no one to nurse them there ; to make matters worse the commissariat broke down hopelessly, and the sick could obtain no proper food. The rate of mortality rapidly increased, simply because the wounded could receive scarcely any attention ; they had to remain as they were with wounds undressed, and faint for lack of nourishment ; a small staff of surgeons and orderlies could see to none but the most pressing cases, and more and more wounded men were continually arriving from the front. The French soldiers were better off, for they had a large number of Roman Catholic Sisters of Mercy, admirably trained and entirely devoted to their tasks. Sir William Russell, *The Times* correspondent, sent home the most heart-rending descriptions of the horrors he witnessed, and of the numbers of brave lives lost merely for the want of a little proper attention, a little suitable food, and the most elementary care. No nurses had been sent out by the English Government for two adequate reasons—(1) the nurses hitherto employed in military hospitals had been rough, coarse, immoral, and therefore undesirable ; and (2) though there were in England ladies, educated, refined, kindly, sympathetic, longing to try their hands at nursing and to

render aid in time of need, they were absolutely devoid of training. Hence it had been deemed best to employ no female nurses at all ; some who might have been sent out would prove to be worse than useless. But now the unutterable horrors of the sad deficiency were most acutely felt, and Sir William Russell sent home impassioned letters to *The Times* asking if there were no capable and devoted women in England who would go out and render aid in the time of bitterest necessity. Something had to be done and that quickly. In this terrible emergency Mr. Sidney Herbert thought of Florence Nightingale and wrote from the War Office a most touching letter of request. He knew well that the popular feeling would be entirely against the proposal that a lady of rank and good breeding should undertake the task of nursing common soldiers ; no lady had ever done such a thing before, it was preposterous ; he knew also that her health could stand no severe strain ; how then could he seek to place her in a post where the strain must be unspeakably great even for the strongest nerves and most courageous soul ? Yet the need was so great he felt he must ask her to undertake the onerous duties of Lady Superintendent of the British hospitals at the seat of war with the full support and authority of the Government to carry out her every wish. Strange to say, that official letter from Mr. Sidney Herbert to Miss Nightingale crossed a letter written to him by her. She had taken to heart the strenuous appeals of Sir William Russell in *The Times ;* she had felt the urgency of the solemn call, and regarded it as a Divine summons which she must not neglect ; and so she had willingly offered her services to the sick and wounded at her country's call. It is needless to say how gladly the Government accepted her offer. Within six days she started with thirty-eight nurses more or less trained to help her in her work, on October 21st, 1854.

And now in thought we follow her to the East, to the great cold comfortless military hospital at Scutari where everything was in the most dire confusion. That building had not been

designed for a hospital; it was simply a vast barracks, quadrangular, and bare. Every part of it was crowded with the dead and dying; neglect, confusion, discomfort, dirt, were everywhere. The most necessary medicines and surgical appliances could not be found. Stores of all kinds from England were landed on the quays of Constantinople, but because there was no English office open for their reception, they were placed in the Turkish custom-house, whence they could not be recovered without long and vexatious delay and the due observance of the most annoying red-tape regulations. Extraordinary blunders were continually made in the stores forwarded from England. Articles of clothing for men at the front who had to bear the extreme severity of Crimean frosts were long delayed, whilst the least needed things were promptly forwarded. Matters were so unutterably bad that Miss Nightingale might have been excused had she determined to throw up her commission, and return home by the next vessel that left Scutari. But she remained steadfast at her post, though, to make things infinitely worse than before, she had not been in Scutari twenty-four hours before there arrived the first ship loads of wounded soldiers from the battle of Inkerman. Night and day she laboured hard to bring order out of chaos; indeed, in those first weeks of severest strain it was said she was on her feet for twenty hours out of the twenty-four. She set to work at once to organise a kitchen and then a laundry, and then to exterminate the rats with which the whole place was infested. And be it remembered that she had not one hospital alone to superintend, but eight; that she had to cure not soldiers' wounds only, but cholera, fever, dysentery, frost bite, and a hundred maladies caught through exposure in the trenches in that bitter winter. In addition to all that she did for the wounded and diseased she found time to provide comforts for the convalescent; for these she set apart a reading and writing room, and obtained supplies of books wherewith to distract the thoughts of patients from the feeling of weariness and the throb of pain. And

while she was doing all this noble and unselfish work in the East fanatics at home once more attacked her religious faith, and said that behind her activities she entertained treacherous schemes for the capture of the souls of her patients. Some declared she had gone to the East to spread Puseyism among the sick soldiers, others that she was a Roman Catholic in disguise and held a particular commission from the Pope; others that she was sowing the seeds of Unitarianism in military furrows; one clergyman protested that she was a dangerous Supralapsarian and should be recalled at once. Fortunately there was one at home in high position who was indignant at these foolish cavils, and determined to vindicate at once the character and labours of Miss Nightingale. Queen Victoria had a womanly heart and would not allow gross injustice to be done to one who at the risk of her life was doing such noble work in her service. She wrote a public letter to Mr. Sidney Herbert in which she gave expression to her sincere regard for her and her admiration of her motives and capacity. And if anything more were needed to quench the spite of the fanatics, it was a poem, entitled "Santa Filomena," by the American poet, Longfellow, in which he spoke of her in warmly appreciative terms:—

"So in that house of misery,
A lady with a lamp I see,
Pass through the glimmering gloom,
And flit from room to room.

And slowly, as in a dream of bliss,
The speechless sufferer turns to kiss
Her shadow, as it falls
Upon the darkening walls.

On England's annals, through the long
Hereafter of her speech and song,
A light its rays shall cast
From portals of the past.

A lady with a lamp shall stand,
In the great history of the land,
A noble type of good
Heroic womanhood."

I must tell in fewest words the remainder of the story of her days in the East. So soon as the bitter winter of 1854 was over, and things worked fairly smoothly in the great hospital at Scutari, Miss Nightingale went on to the Crimea to see for herself the condition of the nursing arrangements at the actual seat of war. There she overtaxed her strength and was struck down by fever, but her illness did not prevent her from carrying out much-needed reforms. On one occasion she went within range of the guns of Sebastopol, but she cared not if only she might do her duty to the sick and wounded. The capture of Sebastopol took place in September, 1855, and then when the war was practically over one might have thought that she could have spared herself all further privation and have returned without delay to her home and friends. Not so, however, for thousands of wounded soldiers in the Crimea still needed all her care. So she remained at her post through the fearful winter of 1855. Besides nursing the sick, as at Scutari she attended to the wants of the convalescents, opened reading-rooms to counteract the temptation to intemperance at the canteens; she encouraged the men to write home to their relatives, and to send money to their families. For this purpose she opened a money-order office, and thus in nine months so large a sum as £71,000 was rescued from waste in the canteens. Not until the last convalescent was ready to leave would she quit the inhospitable shores of the Crimea. She landed at Marseilles, and in order to escape the applause which was everywhere awaiting her, passed through France under an assumed name; she reached her home in August, 1856. And now all the fanatics and detractors were glad to forget their words and to pay homage to the Lady of the Lamp, the gentle benefactor of the wounded soldier. Her name was received everywhere with unbounded enthusiasm. Vast numbers of letters of congratulation and costly gifts from the wealthy were showered upon her. The story of her life became a favourite theme for every magazine writer and newspaper poet. Deputations from public bodies

waited upon her to testify their admiration of her skill and courage, she was thanked in Parliament in glowing terms; she visited the Queen and Prince Albert at Balmoral. But very gladly did she return to a life of strict retirement, far away from the plaudits of a grateful world.

The great work of her life, however, was not yet ended. The severe strain of her two years' work in the East had told grievously on her nervous energy; she became an invalid with small prospect of the return of health and strength, but from her sick room she gave most valuable counsel in all schemes of hospital reform. She wrote a series of text-books on subjects that were nearest to her heart—"Notes on matters affecting the health of the army," "Notes on Nursing," "Notes on Hospitals," "Notes on nursing for the labouring classes," and other works of the greatest practical utility. The sum of £50,000 had been collected in her honour as a Nightingale Hospital Fund, and this, by her request, was employed in founding the Nightingale Training Home in connection with St. Thomas' Hospital in London. It was her influence which had much to do with the establishment of the Red Cross Society which brings immediate aid on the field of battle, and indirectly with the institution of the Queen's Jubilee Nurses in 1887. And I must not omit to mention Miss Nightingale's connection with this city. When Mr. William Rathbone, an esteemed member of this congregation, thought of starting a system of district nursing among the neglected courts and slums of Liverpool, and could obtain no trained nurses for the important work he had in view, he believed that there was one person, and only one, who could give him the counsel that he needed; he consulted Florence Nightingale, and she advised that a Training School for Nurses should be established at once in Liverpool in connection with the Infirmary Hospital. It was Mr. Rathbone who planned and built at his own expense such a Nurses' Training Home as Florence Nightingale suggested. Thus a warm friendship was commenced between these two

noble-hearted philanthropists, and when Mr. Rathbone was called to his rest in 1902, a wreath was placed upon his grave in Toxteth Cemetery which bore this inscription: "In remembrance and humblest love of one of God's best and greatest sons." That wreath was sent by Florence Nightingale.

To her, in her old age, came a joy which is not granted to many—the supreme satisfaction of seeing far and wide the richest fruits of her courage, her devotion, her self-sacrifice. But we can estimate, more correctly perhaps than she could do, the real value of her efforts. As Miss Tooley says at the conclusion of her memoir: "We honour the soldier and applaud the valiant hero in the fight, but it required a more indomitable spirit, a higher courage, to purge the pestilential hospital of Scutari, to walk hour after hour its miles of fetid corridors crowded with suffering, agonised humanity, than in the heat of battle to ride into the very jaws of death, as did the noble 'Six Hundred.' A grateful nation has laid its offering at the feet of the heroine of the Crimea, poets have wafted her fame abroad, the suffering and the poor have loved the very thoughts of her. In barracks, in hospital, and in camp the soldier has cause to bless her name for the comfort he enjoys, the sufferers in our hospital wards have the advantages of trained nurses through her initiative, the sick poor are cared for in their homes, and the inmates of the workhouses are humanely tended, as a direct result of reforms which her example prompted or her counsel advised. All that she has accomplished—but no honour or title could add to the name and fame of Florence Nightingale; it is peerless by virtue of her heroic deeds, her devotion and her love."

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